

The Romance of Henry James's Female Pedophile

Jenn McCollum

The surplus of criticism on Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* is enough to turn even the most creative contemporary critics away. Since the novella's publication in 1898, the uncanny incidents at Bly have continued to taunt critics, especially those primed to unearth a coherent plot. Despite the raging wars of interpretation among different camps, James's knotty ghost story has refused to ease its death-grip on readers' imaginations. Perhaps today more than ever, readers are bewildered about what the text *means*, never mind what it suggests. The ambiguities of plot continue to feed the most recent analyses despite William Van Peer's and Ewout Van der Knapp's painstakingly scientific study in 1995 that anatomized every claim made about *The Turn of the Screw's* plot. Van Peer and Van der Knapp identified two distinct species of argument: those which maintained that the tale is a ghost story, and those which interpreted the ghostly happenings at Bly as the governess' sexual repression or hallucinations. Each camp had seven possible theories that prompted Van Peer and Van der Knapp to question the "truth" of each. After proving the validity of all fourteen theories, and thus proving that the two opposing arguments were equally legitimate, they concluded that "if the contradiction cannot be resolved by eliminating one of its terms, then presumably this is proof that in the realm of interpretation, contradiction may be tolerated" (706). Thus, the primary debate over the plot of *The Turn of the Screw* is potentially resolved – opposite interpretations mutually exclude each other, making both arguments valid. James's novella, then, coheres when the contradictions of plot are embraced. While not every critic is willing to settle for such a thankless contradiction, the emptiness of the plot suggests that the relentless lure of the novella rests elsewhere.

More than a ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw* is an enthusiastic romance of children and sex. The implication that Miles, the young ward of an impressionable governess, is sexually aware, sexually experienced, and sexually hungry has its draw. Titillating in its inappropriateness, the novel suggests through metaphor and silences what was, and still is, unmentionable. Since Richard von Krafft-Ebbing coined the term "pedophilia erotica" in his 1866 *Psychopathia Sexualis*, public attitudes toward child sexuality have become increasingly proscriptive and intimate relationships between adults and children suspect. During the Victorian period, Henry James witnessed several significant changes in the social reception of child-adult chumminess. The society that once embraced Charles Dodgson's (Lewis Carroll's) provocative photographs and drawings of nude and scantily clad child-bodies in compromising positions, was not the same set of Victorians that criticized *The Turn of the Screw* at the *fin de siècle*. Dodgson's child art was permissible as Victorians, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, considered his gaze at the child-body innocent (Leach; Gernsheim). In the tradition of William Blake's imagining of childhood, in which children were esteemed as god-like in their purity and innocence, mid-Victorians still clung to the fantasy that a man who could appreciate the goodness of children must have an ivory-white soul himself. However, late-Victorians exchanged their Romantic ideal of childhood for a more modern model, as several

reviews of James's novella expressed his work as "horribly successful" ("Magic"), "distinctively repulsive" ("The Story"), "cruel and untrue" ("Mr. James's"), "monstrous and incredible" ("Recent"), "hopelessly evil" ("Most Hopelessly"), and unsafe (Barry 173). Like critics today who continue to cling to the text's impenetrable plot, Victorian critics wrestled uncomfortably with the scandalous implication of child sexuality.

Historically, the sexualization of children has courted conflict. In his *Phaedrus*, Plato uses a playfully sexual scene between Socrates and Phaedrus to posit that *eros* (sexual desire) and divine *mania* (madness) are necessary since the love of beautiful young boy-bodies is the first step toward understanding (remembering) the ideal Form. The *mania* inspired by *kalos pais* (erotic interaction) is a "pure and simple [...] gift of the god" (244a: 8-9). Although Socrates believes that sexual relationships between men and boys are essential to enlightenment, he is also careful to note that such relations should be kept from the public eye:

It's inevitable that a lover will be found out [...] The result is that whenever people see you talking with him they'll think you are spending time together just before or after giving way to desire. But they won't even begin to find fault with people for spending time together if they are not lovers; they know one has to talk to someone, either out of friendship or to obtain some other pleasure. (232a-b)

According to Greek tradition, giving way to sexual passion with boys is appropriate in private but must be kept from the public eye which might "find fault" with it. While Greeks may have been more forgiving of sexual adult-child relationships than contemporary American perspectives, Greek pederasty was not an arrangement without critical judgment. Today, pedophilia is a problematic area of sexual politics. As Harris Mirkin observes, discourses about pedophilia resemble the first phase of sexual politicizing, which involves "a battle to prevent the battle, to keep the issue from being seen as political and negotiable" (1). Second phase movements, into which feminism and gay/lesbian politics have recently surfaced, argue over rights and privileges, while the first phase is stagnated, without rights or privileges. As a silenced politic, pedophilia is not a "real discussion" (12). Even though, as Gunter Schmidt argues, "consensual sexual acts between children and adults [are difficult to imagine except in] cases of boys just entering puberty and who have masturbated or had other experiences leading to orgasm with peers" (474), the social excommunication of pedophiles does not allow for a conversation about the differences between consensual and non-consensual child sex. Much of this silencing has to do with social mores, as well as psychological implications.

Moral discourses about pedophilia today increasingly activate social panic. The media explodes with chilling tales of predatory men, instilling fear into parents and caregivers who want to protect their children from immorality and psychologically-debilitating experiences. A widespread moral panic infects many Americans, making them susceptible to manipulation by the media, or what Kathleen Woodward identifies as "statistical panic:" a psychological state in which a person fears for her safety due to media-driven cues (196). Resulting from the fear that "our own individual future is at stake" (196), statistical panic breeds uncertainty. Unsure of other people, and especially of ourselves, panic hinders risk-taking; "what we fear is risk itself" (211). Living in a

world of images deemed “dangerous” by the media, Americans succumb to a fantasy of protection in which they have the responsibility to shelter youth from perceived risk. As the most potentially threatening site of risk to a child, sexual abuse “becomes the virus that nourishes us, that empty point of ignorance about which we are the most knowing” (Kincaid 11). A societal preoccupation with child molestation and sexual abuse allows a well-meaning public to place itself as the lighthouse of protection and surveillance; however, such a fantasy of protection requires an equal fantasy of injury. Popular imaginings of pedophilia enable a discourse of protection even though, as James Kincaid argues, “molesting and the stories protesting the molesting walk the same beat” (12). Both fantasies have the potential to wound children. The fantasy of protection imprisons children in a turret of moral and statistical panic that stagnates healthy risk-taking which has the potential to challenge social constructs; the fantasy of injury, on the other hand, silences a sexual politic through a fuzzy imagining of predatory men in which the culprit is unidentifiable, unknowable, and everywhere.

The attempt to “learn” the pedophile, and hence color the grayish face of injury, is an ongoing challenge. Defined through history as an immoral desire, a psychological disorder, and finally a criminal act, pedophilia has been institutionalized into numerous classifications but certain forms, like female pedophilia, elude recognition or direct confrontation in public discourses. Since the late-Victorians identified intimate child-adult relationships as a sign of immorality instead of purity, the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) went on in 1968 to establish pedophilia as a paraphilic mental disorder in which a person has recurrent, intense sexually-arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors that generally involve children. According to the DSM, “an adult who engages in sexual activity with a child is performing a criminal and immoral act and this is never considered normal or socially acceptable behavior.” As an abnormal, counter-social act, pedophilia occupies what Ann Cvetkovich terms a “counterpublic sphere,” which is marked by an “affective experience that falls outside of institutionalized or stable forms of identity or politics [which] can form the basis for public culture” (17). Although Cvetkovich does not consider pedophilia in her book, *An Archive of Feelings*, as one of the primary kinds of counterpublic spheres that have the potential to reform cultural concepts of normalcy, pedophiles nevertheless occupy this sphere as they are in direct opposition to the sanctioned, appropriated spaces of public discourse in which heterosexual sex among adults indicates normative sexual behavior. Whether or not pedophilia has the possibility to positively change culture is not a point I want to make, or feel invested in. Instead, I wish to show that by continuing to foster a hegemonic discourse about pedophilia, American culture represses a serious consideration of both child and female sexuality by refusing to realize either that they *have* one or that the one they have is socially unacceptable.

The reality of childhood sexuality is at stake in the socially-silenced discourses of pedophilia. Contemporary ideals of the sexualized child have a history, as Steven Angelides observes. Marking the 1980s as a critical stage in theories about childhood sexuality, Angelides posits that before 1980 society imagined childhood as both “sexual *and* innocent,” and that after 1980 society has become obsessed with making a “conscious effort to resolve this contradiction” (100). The American obsession with

figuring childhood as innocent hearkens back to the Romantic ideal epitomized by Blake. As such, “the intra-psychic repression of childhood sexuality is redoubled by the cultural, or, dialogic repression of child sexuality” (Angelides 100). As Shoshana Felman argues in her psychoanalytical analysis of *The Turn of the Screw*, sexuality is part of a child’s unconscious epistemology of sex (Felman “Turning the Screw of Interpretation”). The media and commercial society do not create child sexuality, but rather these social indicators respond to a sexuality that already exists.

Just as the move to silence discourses of pedophilia enlarges the social fear of it, the persistent view of children as innocent makes them more erotic; “erotic children are manufactured – in the sense that we produce them in our cultural factories, the ones that make meanings for us” (Kincaid 9). Today’s erotic child, or what James Kincaid terms the “postromantic child,” has been deployed as “a political and philosophical agent, a weapon used to assault substance and substitute in its place a set of negative inversions: innocence, purity, and emptiness” (10). Although Kincaid counters Felman’s observation about unconscious sexual knowledge to suggest that children *do* have intrinsic innocence and that their sexuality is mass-produced, both theorists arrive at a similar claim: the move to ascribe children with innocence has torn their “innocence” (whether real or imagined) from them. The postromantic child is, indeed, Victorian. Its play at innocence is what makes it a sexual object.

The possibility of innocence in such a complicated world is a comfort that gives humanity a certain degree of hope. That the Victorians squeezed the ideal of childhood innocence to their bosoms like a last scrap of meat seems warranted, and sad, in a world that was increasingly polluted with markers of civilization; scholars such as Judith R. Walkowitz, Ronald Pearsall, and Christopher Herbert have convincingly argued that industry, war, class struggle, and the rise of the individual as an independent, isolated being were driving forces in the changing atmosphere of the Victorian period. Late-Victorians, especially, struggled to identify themselves as both individual and community in the aftermath of radical liberal individualism movements: a tradition led by Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham and followed by Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill. Lost in the blur between individual and nation, defining the Victorian adult was no longer as clear as it may have been. Perhaps in their fear of losing identity or of losing the ability to understand what that identity meant, Victorians strived to define childhood. As Kevin Ohi observes, “to say that children aren’t queer is a way of asserting that we know what children are and that we therefore know what adults are” (82). Attributing children a definite characteristic, like innocence, allowed Victorians to entertain a fantasy of protection, which was essential in a world of such rapid change. However, by associating children with innocence, adults were simultaneously identifying their children as “others” – beings different than them and hence unknowable, even fearful. Children, in other words, were protected but still at risk. As “others,” children’s innocence made them urchins: little imps, scary in their mysterious embodiment of purity.

Like most children in Victorian literature, the innocence of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* is suspect from the start. Indeed, his mixture of purity and sexuality angered

Victorian critics as much as it angers critics today. Part of that anger arises because the distinction between adult and child is not as crystalline as readers may want it to be; “In this *amulette*, this erotic child’s play of a novella, it is difficult to say who is the seducer and who the seduced, or, for that matter, who is the child and who the adult” (Hanson 369). One critical tradition famously accuses Peter Quint, a deceased valet at Bly, of initiating Miles into queer, pedophilic relations, although “he remains guilty without proof, a fiend without a definite crime” (Hanson 367). That Miles is expelled from boarding school “can have but one meaning [...] that he’s an injury to others” (James 11). According to Agieszka Soltysik, the “injury” must be Miles’s queer knowledge as he “[says] ‘things’ to boys he liked, who in turn repeated them to boys *they* liked” (248). Hence, most critics who read Miles as a sexualized child read him as a part of a queer tradition of silence. Quint, who was “much too free” with Miles (James 26), has been cast in the role of homosexual predator. However, his “unmentionable” sex acts do not seem to cause critics the kind of panic found in contemporary social discourses about pedophilia. On the contrary, critics such as Soltysik display an eagerness to address the issue of Quint’s queer pedophilia. Within Quint’s relations with Miles is writ a familiar script: that of homosexuality. In fact, almost every critical register of Quint’s pedophilia is associated with homosexuality. Moreover, as Jonathan Flatley’s recent reading of *The Turn of the Screw* suggests, most contemporary critics that confront any aspect of sexuality in the text seem anxious to reveal a homosexual subtext as a way to make observations about James’s own sexuality. Although pedophilia and homosexuality are not interchangeable, most critics interchange them when analyzing Quint. Miles’s sexuality, as a result, is identified as homosexual, at least initially. Homosexuality is a familiar societal marker, as part of Mirkin’s second phase of sexual politics. So when Ellis Hanson argues that the reader is supposed to find Quint’s “desire to participate with perverse pleasure rather than paranoid disavowal in the queer erotics of children” inadmissible (368), he neglects that by relating Quint’s pederasty to homosexuality, he, like numerous other critics, appropriates it in some sense. There are two registers for the sexual atmosphere in the text: homosexual and heterosexual (Soltysik 249). However, curiously missing from these analyses is the pedosexual. What is less admissible, more unspeakable, than *heterosexual* pedophilia? And what, then, is more silenced than female pedophilia?

Seen as a most perverse act against nature, the existence of female pedophilia is still questioned today (Chow and Choy 213). Women’s social roles as nurturing mothers and care-givers have been essentialized since gender difference became a topic of discussion. The women’s movement in general was fueled by early feminist thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Dinah Craik who argued that women have an important role in the nation in raising and educating children, and comforting companions. While most feminists challenge the biological differences between men and women, today many Americans continue to subscribe to a sociology of motherhood that passes the responsibility of child care primarily to the mother’s hands. The immense social discomfort Americans show toward issues of motherhood is apparent in the law system, as well as in literature. In family law, contact stipulations tended to favor the mother for the primary care of children after divorce through 1980 (some states still favor the mother), and have prompted father’s rights movements (*American Bar Association*).

Similarly, Toni Morrison's fictional depictions of compromised mother-figures who murder their children to save them, or rip the arms from children's sockets out of jealousy, continue to meet with scathing criticisms for their "unwomanly" portrayals. Public reaction to Morrison's mother-figures shows that Americans remain focused on the mother as the primary nurturer of children.

The first psychological study of a female pedophile, conducted by Eva Chow and Alberto Choy in 2002, has met with much debate. Despite the definition of pedophiles as *people* who desire sexual intimacy with children, many contemporary literary publications and social science studies about pedophilia slant their language at men. For example, in Mirkin's study of sexual politics he describes pedophiles as "*men* whose sexual wishes and desires for relationship bonds and love are focused either primarily or exclusively on children who have not reached puberty" (473; italics added). Recent studies in criminology and psychiatry conducted by Kolja Schiltz and Boris Schiffer prove that today the trend is still to consider pedophilia as an entirely male pathology, as each study uses only male test subjects. The newest research that argues for pedophilia as a pathology is the same research that dismisses the space that women occupy as pedophiles in society. Furthermore, through the methods of gross examination, the male body is used as evidence to measure signs of pedophilia (such as erectile, brain, and skin responses), excluding the female body a potential site for disease. In response, researchers like Kelly Christopher and Kim Turner have conducted all-female studies to replicate the male-centered trends because "relatively little research has been conducted on female sex-offenders in comparison to males" (Christopher 872), and "female sex offenders may not fit neatly into the same typologies that criminal justice research has developed for male sex offenders" (Turner 880). Similarly, Dominique Roe-Sepowitz has taken necessary pains to show that "in contrast to portrayals in previous research [...] female sex offenders are not a homogeneous group" (405).

Like A.J. Cooper's clinical study of Miss K in 1990, Chow and Choy's study of Miss A begins with the admission that "although there is a large body of literature on male sex offenders, there are few studies on female sex offenders" (211). Indeed, the slight amount of attention given to female pedophiles is staggering, considering that, according to David Finkelhor's numerous studies, women's sexual abuse of children is much more serious than men's because women are more likely to have abused more children for a longer period of time (Murray 215), are more intrusive, and more likely to use higher rates of force than men (Moulden 388). Finkelhor found that in cases of daycare molestation, more than 60% of children who were molested, were molested by women (Murray 213). Heather Moulden's 2007 follow-up to Finkelhor's research verifies that "despite a social reluctance to acknowledge female sexual abusers, reports suggest that they account for between 3% and 15% of all sexual offences" (387). However, as Richard Tewksbury reports, that number is probably much higher since "female sex offending is [...] acknowledged as possibly less likely to be detected or reported" (30). Despite the general reluctance to pursue female suspects and to incarcerate them (Moulden 199), criminal acts by female offenders have reached a ratio of 6:1 compared to male criminal acts (Palmero 30). Moulden's study of female sex

offenders found that “females offended against younger victims and were more violent as compared with male abusers” (399). Similarly, George Palermo recently observed that “girls, apparently less aggressive than boys in general, are becoming more antisocial and violent, participating in the large cauldron of criminality [which] may undermine the testosterone hypothesis that fuels a belief in the tendency to criminality in males” (494). With these findings, the resistance to consider the female pedophile in social science researching is suspect.

Chow and Choy’s study of Miss A, a 23-year old mother of two sons, found that she met DSM’s criteria for a pedophile. She confessed two incidents of sexual abuse to her priest in which she, while babysitting, bathed young girls and continued to lick or rub their vaginal area and then masturbated herself. Miss A admitted that she believed these girls, aged 4 and 5, were sexually taunting her and were pleased with her initiation of a sex act. She decided to seek help in the fear that she may someday give birth to a daughter (214). Miss A read her desire for child sex as unnatural, according to the social norms. According to Schmidt, “it is quite clear that pedophilia in contemporary Western societies represents a form of sexuality that cannot be lived out, since it is in conflict with a central social covenant based upon sexual self-determination and consensual sexuality.” Schmidt goes on, though, to identify this tension as an entirely *male* problem: “That is the dilemma of the male pedophile” (376).

The dilemma of the female pedophile is that female desire for child sex does not exist in the body of social consciousness. Femininity has become a kind of genre that society believes it can read. Lauren Berlant asserts that “for femininity to be a genre *like* an aesthetic one means that it is a structure of conventional expectation that people rely on to provide certain kinds of affective intensities” (4). Although perhaps to a lesser degree than in the past, society still looks to women as representatives of national affect. Arlie Hochschild has argued in her book, *The Managed Heart*, that “feeling rules,” or scripts of emotion, are appropriated by women and affect women more markedly than men:

As a matter of tradition, emotion management has been better understood and more often used by women as one of the offerings they trade for economic support. Especially among dependent women of the middle and upper classes, women have the job (or think they ought to) of creating the sense of surprise at birthdays, or displaying alarm at the mouse in the kitchen. Gender is not the only determinant of skill in such managed expression and in the emotion work needed to do it well. But men who do this work well have slightly less in common with other men than with other women. When the “womanly” art of living up to *private* emotional conventions goes public, it attaches itself to a different profit-and-loss statement. (20)

While both men and women tend to privatize their socially-unaccepted sexual feelings toward children, the public reception of those private feelings is certainly different and dependent upon gender. There is still little room in the genre of femininity to allow for alternative readings. While male pedophiles occupy the imagination of Americans obsessed with protecting youth, female pedophiles are not allowed a voice in the national imagination. They are completely swallowed into obscurity by what Berlant terms “mass-mediated identity.”

Addressing femininity from the perspective of the mediated fantasies that magnetize many different kinds of women to the scene of suffering, sacrifice, survival, criticism, and sometimes sublimity that has historically provided the narrative of women's culture thus shows us something about the operation of mass-mediated identity. (11)

As mass-mediated entities, then, female pedophiles may question, like society, whether they, themselves, actually exist. The female pedophile is the ultimate non-entity.

What is more alluring than *The Turn of the Screw's* plot is the identity of the governess. She frustrates critics more than any other character in the novella because she eludes classification. Like the female pedophile, she is the ultimate non-entity. And even more like the female pedophile, James's governess meets all the characteristics for the DSM description of pedophilia. I am not the first critic to observe that the governess desires child sex. Although, with such an abundant amount of work on the governess in the long critical tradition of *The Turn of the Screw*, few scholars have followed in Sami Ludwig's shoes, despite the fact that most analyses display an obsessive preoccupation with the governess. Ludwig's essay, "Metaphors, Cognition, and Behavior: The Reality of Sexual Puns in *The Turn of the Screw*," analyzes James's text most similarly to my own analysis, and I would like to use his claims to push forward into a more risky arena. Ludwig insists that the puns and the obscure language in the text make the most sense when literal sex is read into the plot; "sex now makes the imagery cohere and [sex] becomes a real issue in the world represented" (40). If, as Hanson has suggested, Peter Quint, with his "rare instances of working-class testosterone" fails as a romantic hero (367), perhaps the governess can be read as a kind of romantic hero, and her love affair with Miles, a true romance.

Reading *The Turn of the Screw* as a romance between the governess and Miles requires an understanding of the history of pedophilia, the role that the female pedophile plays in that history, and the history of child sexuality. Apart from these histories, which I have only briefly delineated, the governess has her own critical history, begun by Edmund Wilson who was the first to theorize that her undeniably sexual obsessions were signs of repression, centered on an insatiable desire for the children's absent uncle. According to Wilson, the governess projects her lustful feelings for the uncle onto the children in a way that reflects Victorian discourses about sex. Several critics follow in Wilson's shoes by continuing to view the governess' "sexual repression" in the classical Victorian context. Antonio Sanna has most recently added to Wilson's claim by observing that:

If we think of the governess's behavior as enforcing the sexual prudery and strictures of the Victorian age on the children (and particularly those of the end of the century, when the tale was published), we could say that she enforces on them the rules to which she herself has submitted. If we think of the children as actually enjoying the continued community of sexual affections with Quint and Miss Jessel through the ghosts' apparitions, the governess is attempting to enforce the power of nineteenth-century patriarchy over the desires of Miles and Flora by preventing them from a possible (homo)sexual bond with the ghosts. She reenacts over Miles and Flora the power which has been enacted on her, the submission to the masculine element in the family, to patriarchy. (105)

Sanna's reading of the text is useful since he upholds several conventions of interpretation: 1) the children suffer sexual damage 2) the sexual damage is delivered through Quint or Jessel 3) Quint and Jessel involve Miles and Flora, respectively, in a homosexual bond 4) the governess upholds a repressive, patriarchal view of intercourse, which causes the havoc at Bly. Despite the volumes of criticism on this perplexing tale, very few analyses contradict more than one of the stipulations Sanna presents, and no analyses challenge all of them. My reading of *The Turn of the Screw* attempts to challenge each of these theories by showing that Miles is not wholly sexually damaged, that all the sexual intercourse involving children also involves the governess, that Miles is predominately implicated in a heterosexual bond, and that the governess is not sexually repressed, nor does she uphold a patriarchal, conservative ideal of sex.

Of all my forthcoming arguments, the one that will meet the most resistance is that *The Turn of the Screw* is the first literary romance of the female pedophile of its kind. I do not argue that a romance must be comfortable; in fact, the best ones aren't. Even those who buy into Ludwig's assertion that Miles's "death" at the end of the novella is only figurative, may find the "romantic" aspect of my argument uncomfortable. As Sheila Teahan suggests, the governess uses the terms "literal" and "figurative" in opposite ways: "the governess says 'literally' when she means 'figuratively.'" The categories of literal and figurative have no clear application to the idiom in question, which is neither overtly figurative in character nor contains a dead metaphor that could be activated" (64). Teahan's analysis shows that the "literal" death of Miles can be dismissed in several ways, and not only according to the method suggested by Ludwig. Ludwig reads Miles's "death" as a mere symbol of "transition, an act of sexual initiation, which leaves Miles alive. Thus we would have a triple pun on 'death:' 1) physical death, 2) orgasm, 3) rite of passage" (50). I need not make the same argument about the erotic interactions between Miles and governess, since Ludwig does an excellent job delineating the textual evidence. But if I am to pick up where he leaves off to argue that James intended for readers to suspect that Miles is still alive, I must show that James opens the possibility of Miles's perseverance, and hence the emergence of a fascinating, although wayward, love story.

Miles is Douglas from the novella's frame, and the playful anonymous narrator of the same frame is no other than our unnamed governess. Miles does not die at the end of the action at Bly but rather he lives on, continuing to experience sexual pleasure with his governess and, after marrying her, continues to relish the moments of scandalous equivocation that their romance is dependent upon. The playful, flirtatious conversation between Douglas and the narrator in the frame is the first hint of their true identities. The narrator watches with a kind of sardonic pleasure as Douglas approaches the fire to tell a story that "nobody but [him], till now, has ever heard" (1). The narrator and Douglas play off each other, using the same kind of ambiguous language that Miles and the governess use in the governess' story; they excite their listeners with the promise of scandal in a similar fashion. Together, they construct the ultimate fairy tale. By using pseudonyms, either in the story or in their encounter with others around the fire, they separate themselves from judgment of their peers. Furthermore, by telling that the governess "has been dead these twenty years" (2), and that Douglas himself did not

participate in the occurrences at Bly, they are able to narrate their peculiar love story to strangers while protecting the governess' identity. Above all, the governess' identity must be protected because an association with female pedophilia would wreak havoc on their position among strangers. Moreover, there is no language for it.

Douglas does not censor himself in the same way that he censors the governess. His relationship to the governess is the same as Miles's: "she was ten years older than I. She was my sister's governess." He doesn't hide the fact that he "liked her extremely and am glad to this day to think she liked me too" (2). Implicating himself in a pedophilic relationship is much different than implicating her. Indeed, Mrs. Griffin enjoys imagining a young boy in love with an older woman; "Well, if I don't know who she was in love with I know who *he* was [...] it's rather nice" (3). A young boy loving a grown woman is "nice," but a woman loving a boy has no affective function in the story. The story is told, firstly, as a love story: "I see. She was in love" (3). Everyone wants to know with whom was the governess in love – in fact, it is the object of everyone's attention – but no one present can imagine the truth. And Douglas is right – the story will not tell that Miles and the governess were lovers in a "literal, vulgar way" (3). The most vulgar way would be to say the "word" that even Mrs. Grose keeps back when addressing the governess: pedophile. However, the story isn't really a vulgar one, despite the churlish context.

The Turn of the Screw tells a story of two inexperienced, feverishly-sexed lovers coming together under the horrific circumstances of a socially-condoned act of pedophilia. A story that begins with the callow governess on a "see-saw" of "the right throbs and the wrong" (6) finishes with the ripe ejaculation of a job well done. The sexually-naïve governess transforms, by the end, into a woman who has discovered the right jerks and strokes to make Miles utter "the cry of a creature hurled over an abyss" (88). She hardly upholds the image of a repressed, patriarchal Victorian spinster. As Miles falls into her arms, she begins "to feel what it truly was that [she] held" – not Miles's corpse, but rather the slack, satisfied body of a boy disposed of the sexual temptation haunting him heretofore. According to Ludwig, there are three "turns" in the development of sexual temptation between Miles and the governess that lead to literal sexual intercourse: "sexuality, which first appeared merely in the symbolic imagery and then openly became a question between the two, must now, in the third rhetorical turn, be metaphorically transferred to a real context" (49). The newly sexually-proficient governess marries Miles, as evidenced by the fact that they are still together, as well as their closing words in the frame:

Mrs. Griffin to Douglas: What's your title?

Douglas: Oh I haven't one.

Governess: Oh / have!

In a work full of puns, this pun on the title of the governess' story and class evidences a claim that many critics have already asserted: that the governess is concerned about moving up into Miles's class. Even critics, like Christine Butterworth-Dermott, who decline to acknowledge the governess' sexual longing for Miles, still maintain that even though "her fantasy centers not on sexual consummation, [it does focus on] marriage"

(44). Butterworth-Dermott maintains that *The Turn of the Screw*, read as a fairy tale, ends in tragedy as the governess “never realizes that what she desires is only possible in fiction” (46). However, by reading the frame as an incognito continuation of the governess’ story, the *fiction* is precisely the method through which the governess achieves her desire: a desire that is not allowed even in the imagination of the community – the hankering for both sexual consummation and marriage with Miles. The implication in the closing lines of the frame is that Douglas has sacrificed his “title” so that the governess can gain one. The story itself functions as a kind of marriage license.

But even the outcome of marriage between Douglas and the governess, which naturalizes an otherwise preternatural act of female pedophilia by returning a counterpublic feeling to the public discourse, may not be enough to persuade some critics. There is a long tradition of reading of the governess as a displaced non-entity, as critics often pillage her authority, her sense of self – even her very existence – by supplanting her identifying characteristics to someone or something else. Like the cultural tradition of pedophilia, and especially female pedophilia, critical confrontation of the governess attempts to argue her away. Although they don’t know what to do with her, and don’t seem to want her there, critics can’t seem to leave the governess alone. By squeezing her into the context of Victorian prudery, most critics argue, like Wilson, that the governess is sexually repressed. A distinction needs to be made between the social and cultural atmosphere of sexual repression in which the governess lives, and the very different nature of her actions and emotions. Butterworth-Dermott is correct to observe that “In the Victorian era, the sexual act was seen as animalistic, and sometimes even ‘monstrous’” (44). Commenting on Victorian sexual repression, Foucault claims that:

by speaking about it so much, by discovering it multiplied, partitioned off, and specified precisely where one had placed, what one was seeking essentially was to conceal sex. Until Freud at least, the discourse of sex – the discourse of scholars and theoreticians – never ceased to hide the thing it was speaking about. (53)

By *not* having his characters speak directly about sex, then, James attempts to *reveal* the sexual nature of their interactions. Despite the repressive potential of some aspects of Victorian society, James seems to suggest, like Foucault, that “we must abandon [...] the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression” (49). James’s portrayal of a most unorthodox sexuality, that of the female pedophile, speaks more loudly than any other in the text. The unnamed governess and her unnamable act are hence the most articulated. A discourse of female pedophilia rivals the repressive sexual environment of *The Turn of the Screw*.

That critics have tried to erase the governess from the text is obvious. Like Alejandro Amenabar’s 2001 film adaptation *The Others*, critics have attempted to read the governess as a ghost herself. Namwali Serpell questions the existence of the governess by reading James’s use of mirrors and reflections through the text as symbols of her disintegrating identity;

The governess puts herself in the position of the vanished visitor, even imitating[the ghost’s] exact gesture of applying his face to the window pane. This

action alone suggests a kind of stepping through the looking glass. [...] Not only does the governess become what she was looking at, she then also gets to see what she looked like when she was looking. (241)

Serpell suggests that not only is the governess ghost-like, but that she may actually be or become a ghost. Similarly, Kiyoon Jang has proposed “an analogy between the secretarial ghostwriter figure in the nineteenth-century and the governess [as] both figures are situated in a system of delegation. Placed in an intermediary position between a text-property and the author/proprietor, they substitute for their employers, carrying out and textualizing their employers’ ideas” (15). By “substituting” the governess’ position with both the uncle and James himself, Jang attempts to dismiss her reality. John Carlos Rowe has emphasized the medium-like quality of the governess by “insisting that her narrative merely enacts and re-enacts the ‘absent authorities’ of the master and James” (qtd. in Jang 13). These popular imaginings either obliterate the governess’ identity as a human being or replace the governess’ femininity with masculinity so that, even if she *is* a pedophile, she is seen as acting as a male instead of a woman. With a ghost-like identity like Peter Quint, then, the governess of these readings would involve Miles in a kind of homosexual pedophilic relationship which, although rather uncouth, is not as gauche as the alternative: heterosexual female pedophilia.

If the governess’ authority is not her own, if even her actions belong to a male superior, then what is she left? Perhaps only the governess’ emotions are left to speak for her. As Alison Jaggar argues, emotions are closely related to action and values as “they are ways in which we engage actively and even construct the world” (152-153). If the governess has no tangible existence and if even her sexual actions can be disregarded, then her emotions still have a voice. The politics of emotion, like sexual politics, have a history of exclusion in which “the Western tradition has not seen everyone as equally emotional” (Jaggar 157). While my reading of the governess’ emotion integrates arguments along the line of affect theory, which has as deep a history as sexual politics, I do not wish to make the distinction here between emotion and affect. Although making the distinction would subtly complicate my claims, I must save such complication for a longer piece. The term “emotion” will be used to signify the expression of feeling, as we read it in James’s novella, through the governess’ language, silences, and perceived tone.

Although the New Critics have traditionally read tone as a “de-emotionalized concept,” it can give readers cues about the emotions of characters, as well as involve the reader in emotional response (Ngai 29). In the governess’ rainbow of feelings, her primary emotional register is excitement. Indeed, while reading James’s tale, which is conveyed through the governess’ language, we cannot help but feel her excitement. Her narrative language builds a rollercoaster of emotion, but the governess always seems excited about where it will go next – not anxious or scared. Like an enraptured child, she narrates her tale always on the precipice of extreme *jouissance*. The hodgepodge of exclamation points, emphasized words in italics, dashes, and thrilling silences throughout the governess’ narration speak for themselves; I need not pull out a specific passage to evidence this, as any passage will suffice. She is not ashamed. Nor is she hysterical. She is only what seems most upsetting; she is egregiously excited. Her

narration of Miles' actions and language, as well, serve to illustrate the same point: he is enthusiastically agog with anticipation of sex with the governess. After all, the governess has already lived the experience she relays. Her ambition is not to show readers her fear but rather to expose her pleasure – the pleasure of the female pedophile – which has no vehicle except through the metaphorical language of fiction.

The “animatedness” of the governess' language may cause anxiety for readers (since, as critics always point out, we are not sure what the plot is), but the governess herself does not show overwhelming signs of anxiety. Nevertheless, critics want to see the governess as a nervous woman on the verge of hysteria. Because “symptoms of hysteria are the result of trauma” (Kaplan 26), viewing the governess as a hysterical female allows a normative reading of her pedophilic actions. Hysteria is related to trauma, which has an undeniable history of shame. As Cathy Caruth argues, “for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; the *survival itself*, in other words, *can be a crisis*” (9). Survivors of a traumatic event will often feel guilt, which may proceed to shame. Indeed, Choy and Chow observed from their case study of Miss A that “shame and guilt were prominent emotions in female sex offenders” (211). Readers expect the governess to show shame, as a regular sex offender would. Many critics, like David Wagenknecht and Albaraq Mahboboh, have used evidence from Freudian theory and phenomenology to show that the governess meets the criteria for hysteria. Furthermore, several feminist critics, such as Paula Cohen, have attempted to rescue the governess from injurious theories of hysteria by claiming that her hysteria operates as a protest against oppression (65). Regardless of whether critics mean to appropriate the governess' hysteria or not, by interpreting the governess' emotions as a part of the hysteria-trauma-shame continuum, they attempt to criminalize her pedophilia and hence fix the problem of the text without ever acknowledging it. By suggesting that the governess is hysterical or feels shame is to say that she acknowledges the wrongness of her desires. Such an acknowledgment lessens the effect/affect that the possibility of female pedophilia opens.

What is most traumatic about the governess' narrative is its effect on readers. As the body of criticism about *The Turn of the Screw* shows, readers tend to avoid the distresses that the idea of female pedophilia presents in the text. The avoidance of the issue of female pedophilia is not restricted to the text alone, but can be used as a way to suggest that the evasion exists on a social level. It is not the governess' trauma that preoccupies us, but our own. American society has silenced the female pedophile from public discourses, removing her from history, because she threatens to deconstruct the cultural imagining of femininity as a genre. By coming to terms with the current (mis)understandings of female pedophilia and child sexuality, by exhuming the fears that each of these issues present, Americans can continue to re-construct their history, to heal some disavowed, disowned wounds. As Cathy Caruth claims, “through the notion of trauma [...] we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, a precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not” (*Unclaimed* 11).

Through fiction, James narrated the first romance of the female pedophile. Perhaps pedophilia is safest in the context of fiction. Certainly, I have not been arguing that pedophilia, female or male, should be reconsidered as a safe or beneficial practice. Nevertheless, allowing that females and children each have a substantial sexual history beyond the normative cultural imagination offers a way to change or terminate the “ritually sealed and almost inescapable” feeling rules (Hochschild 19) that threaten to stagnate social progress. Dabbling into alternative readings of counterpublic issues, like pedophilia, advances theories of everyday trauma that help us occupy these spaces rather than evacuating them (Cvetkovich 15). Polarizing monstrosity and innocence, like essentializing femininity and masculinity, has its cost. The overwhelming panic that greets us in almost every facet of everyday life seems to get larger the more we insist on separating purity from possible contamination. By allowing even the most hideous of faces to take shape in public, by interpreting the most unfathomable reading into a classical text, we have the ability to quell the disease that is avoidance.

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